

AMOS OZ

Amos Oz is Israel's most celebrated and greatest living novelist, as well as short story writer, non-fiction essayist, editor and author of children's books. He is regarded as one of the most original and brilliant contemporary authors of the 20th century, described by *The Times* in England as "One of the greatest prose writers in contemporary fiction."

An activist who has been at the forefront of pursuing peace between Israelis and Palestinians for more than 30 years, he has been described as the modern prophet of Israel by the *Sunday Telegraph*. He has been nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature for a few years running.

As Israel's foremost intellectual, he speaks with humanity, daring and sanity. *Newsweek* once described him as a "Zionist Orwell" - a complex man passionate about simple decency and determined above all to tell the truth, regardless of whom it offends. Likewise, *The Washington Post* has written that, "Countries need writers as their voices of conscience; few have them. Israel is one of the few. It has Amos Oz."

One of the founders in 1978 of Peace Now (an Israeli organisation committed to employing non-violent means to secure peace with the Palestinians), Amos Oz has devoted his life to campaigning for peace and participated in various efforts seeking an end to the bloodshed between Israelis and Arabs.

Amos Oz was born on May 4 1939 in Jerusalem to a family of Zionists who emigrated in the early 1930s from Russia and Poland and which included several writers and scholars. At the age of 15, Oz decided to leave his native city, change his last name from Klausner to Oz, and to join Kibbutz Hulda, a collective farm.

Increasingly, however, Oz found himself pulled toward studying and writing. He took leave from the kibbutz to complete a degree at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, studying philosophy and literature. Promising sales of his stories and novels allowed him increased time away from farming in the kibbutz to write.

His first short stories were published when he was in his early twenties. *Where the Jackals Howl*, his first collection of short stories was published in 1965. The Times Literary Supplement enthused, "It rarely happens that literature offers a more profound insight into politics and culture than does news reporting. Amos Oz has performed this rare service" while The Sunday Telegraph noted that "Oz deserves his high reputation."

For twenty-five years he divided his time between writing and teaching in the kibbutz high school. In 1986, after 25 years in Kibbutz Hulda, Oz and his wife were compelled to move to a drier climate because one of their three children developed asthma to the southern town of Arad.

Since 1993 he has held the Agnon Chair in Modern Hebrew Literature, Ben-Gurion University, Beersheba, teaching as a full Professor of Hebrew literature.

Since the 1967 Six Day War, Oz has published numerous articles and essays about the Israeli/Arab conflict. Oz's debut collection of articles and essays, *Under this Blazing Light*, published in 1979 offered commentary on writing, culture and Israel's political situation. Writer Chaim Potok hailed Amos Oz as "one of the great writers of our time"

Melding the personal with the political, this writer of international acclaim scrutinizes what it means to be an Israeli. Since the 1967 Six Day War, he has been active in various groups and organizations of the Israeli Peace movement, which advocates a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He was involved in the Committee for Peace and Security (1967) and in the *Moked* and *Sheli* movements, and has been among the chief spokespeople of the Peace Now movement since its founding in 1977. Since 2003 Amos Oz is one of the leaders of "The Geneva Initiative" - an Israeli-Palestinian Peace Movement. In 2006, he published *How to cure a fanatic*, a series of meditative essays about radicalism. The Philadelphia Inquirer noted, "True to his liberal humanistic roots, Oz believes everyone in the Arab-Israeli mess simply needs, in the end, to be reasonable"

My Michael, perhaps Amos Oz's best known novel, appeared in Israel in 1968 and immediately caused a literary storm, attracting enthusiastic admiration. Described as the Israeli *Madame Bovary*, over 100,000 copies of the Hebrew edition have been sold, making it one of the biggest selling books ever in Israel. *My Michael* has also been published (often more than once) in America, Australia, England, France, Spain, Catalonia, Portugal, Holland, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Poland, Japan, Egypt, Romania, Bulgaria, Brazil, Hungary, Russia and the Ukraine. Many of Amos Oz's publishers published special editions in 1988 to mark the novel's 20th anniversary. *My Michael* was made into a film by Dan Wollman in 1975 and continues to be shown in cinemas from time to time around the world. In 1999 *My Michael* was selected by Bertelsmann international publishers' panel of judges and readers' club as one of the 100

greatest novels of the 20th Century. The same year it was chosen as one of the five best foreign novels appearing in China

Over the last 41 years, Amos Oz has published more than 30 Books, among them novels, collections of stories and novellas, children's books and books of articles and essays (as well as selections of essays that appeared in various languages). His non-fiction writings include *Under this Blazing Light* (1979), *In the Land of Israel* (1983), *The Slopes of Lebanon* (1987), and *Israel, Palestine and Peace: Essays* (1995). His two studies of literature are *The Story Begins*, and *The Silence of Heaven: Agnon's Fear of God*, an examination of several of the writings of Hebrew literature's first and only Nobel Laureate S.Y. Agnon.

His books and stories have been translated into 30 languages in 35 countries. Over the last 45 years he has published hundreds of articles and essays on literary, political, and social topics in Israeli and international journals, newspapers and magazines.

Amos Oz has anchored his fictions in the stormy history of his homeland. The golden thread that runs through his writing, both fiction and non-fiction, is the x-raying of human nature, admitting its frailty but celebrating in its variety. Mr Oz time and again makes the plea for dialogue, for embracing faith in the future. Through stunning images, multiplex plots and captivating characters, Oz limns the people of Israel, its political tribulations and biblical landscape.

Amos Oz's extraordinary contribution to the arts and to humanity has been recognised through scores of awards, prizes, appointments and honorary medals. The incredible number of international awards that has been bestowed on him is a fitting tribute and testimony to the high regard he is held in internationally and to his profound and exceptional stature as one of the world's finest authors and advocates for reconciliation.

In 1965, his first collection *Where the Jackals Howl* was published and received the Holon Municipal Prize for Literature, Israel. In 1976, he won the Brenner Prize for Literature in Israel for the novella, *The Hill of Evil Counsel*. His first children's book *Sumchi* was awarded the 1978 Ze'ev Award for Children's Literature, Israel, the 1978 Hans Christian Andersen Medal for Children's Literature, Denmark, The 1993 Luchs Prize for Children's Literature, Bremen Germany and the Hamoré Prize for Children's Literature, France. In 1983 he received the Bernstein Prize for Literature, Israel for *A Perfect Peace* and in 1985 he was awarded Writer of the Year by the Lotos Club, New York.

In 1986 he received the 1986 Bialik Prize, one of Israel's most prominent prizes. He has been honoured with the 1988 French Prix Femina for best foreign novel appearing in France or his novel *Black Box* and Wingate Prize, London for the same work. In 1992, he won the Frankfurt Peace Prize. In 1994 he received the Maurice A. Stiller Prize for Literature, Baltimore Hebrew University, MD and in 1997, The Blue Cobra Award (Switzerland) for his novel *Panther in the Basement*.

In 1998 he was awarded his country's most prestigious prize: the Israel Prize for Literature, on the fiftieth anniversary year of Israel's independence.

In acknowledgment of his work as an activist for human rights and peace, in 2002 he received the Freedom of Expression Prize, awarded by the Norwegian Authors' Union and The International Medal of Tolerance, awarded by the Polish Ecumenical Council. In 2003, he won Wizo-France award for Israeli Literature for *The Same Sea*, a work described as "extraordinary" by the Guardian.

He has been named Officer of Arts and Letters of France in 1994, and in 1997 President Jacques Chirac awarded him Knight's Cross of the Legion D'Honneur of the Republic of France

In 2004 he received the Ovidius Prize, from Romania's writers union, for his literary merit and his peace work. The same year he was awarded the Lombardia Peace Prize (Milano). In 2005 he was named as the winner of the Goethe cultural prize, one of the country's top awards, for his lifetime's output. The prize jury said Oz's variety of subjects and virtuosity of style made him one of the most important contemporary authors.

In 2005 Professor Oz was nominated for "Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters", French Republic.

Professor Oz has been a Visiting Fellow at St. Cross College, Oxford, England, Writer in Residence, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, University of California, Berkeley Writer in Residence/Professor of literature, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO, Writer in Residence Visiting Professor of Literature, Boston, Massachusetts, 1996, Writer in Residence, Tel Aviv University, Writer in Residence/Visiting Professor of Literature, Princeton University (Old Dominion Fellowship), Weidenfeld Professor of European and Comparative Literature, Oxford University, Visiting

Writer, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN (Patten Lecturer), Visiting Writer, Tübingen University, Germany (Poetic Dozent). In 1989 he was elected member of the Catalan Institute of the Mediterranean, Barcelona, Spain and in 1991 he was elected to full membership in the Academy of the Hebrew Language. He was admitted in 2005 as an Honorary Member of the Hellenic author's Society, Greece. Oz has served as visiting fellow at Oxford University, author-in-residence at the Hebrew University and writer-in-residence at Colorado College. Amos Oz was elected in 1999 as Honorary Fellow, St. Anne's College, Oxford England

Professor Oz's tremendous level of commitment to expression, to literature and to humanity has been formally recognised through various Honorary Doctorates. In 1992 he received an Honorary Doctorate from Tel Aviv University; In 1998, he received an Honorary Doctorate from Brandeis University, MA; In 1988 he received an Honorary Doctorate from Western New England College and an Honorary Doctorate from Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati OH and Jerusalem; in 2006 he received an Honorary Doctorate from Hebrew University, Jerusalem and an Honorary Doctorate from the Jewish Theological Seminary,

In 2002, the Hebrew version of *A Tale of Love and Darkness* was published to unprecedented acclaim. Since then, the book has reaped a series of local and international awards. Beginning in 2004, it won the Prix "France Culture", The Catalonia International Prize, The International "Die Welt" Literary Award (Berlin) and The Sandro Onofri Literary Prize (Roma). In 2005, the book won the Bruno Kreisky Prize for Political Literature (Vienna), The Koret Jewish Book Awards (San Francisco), Wingate Prize, London, and in 2006 Oz received the National Jewish Book Award from the Jewish Book Council and The Agnon-Jerusalem Prize for *A Tale of Love and Darkness*.

Writing in the Washington Post in 2004, Alberto Manguel has observed that Oz, "Both in his fiction and his essays, Oz has proven himself one of our essential writers, laying out for our observation, in ever-increasing breadth and profundity, the mad landscape of our time and his place -- always enlarging the scope of his questions while avoiding the temptation of dogmatic answers."

Mr Oz is the first Israeli to be awarded an Honorary Degree by The University of Melbourne.